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ABSTRACT

Recent research on the effects of women's studies courses has indicated that there are two general approaches to teaching: a concern for competence or mastery and a concern for personal change and advocacy. It was hypothesized that students taking a psychology of women course would become more androgynous and masculine in sex-role concept, more assertive, and more positive in their attitudes toward women than students taking other courses. Undergraduate female students, 40 from psychology of women classes and a comparison group of 31 from classes in psychology and political science, completed pre- and post-test questionnaires, specifically, the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, the Rathus Assertiveness Scale, and the Craig Attitudes Toward Women Scale. Data strongly supported the hypothesis and seemed to indicate that some measure of resocialization did take place for the students in psychology of women courses. (Author/HLM)

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THE INFLUENCE OF A PSYCHOLOGY OF WOMEN COURSE ON SEX-ROLE CONCEPT, ASSERTIVENESS, AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN

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Presented at the Eastern Psychological Association's Fifty-First Annual Meeting, Hartford, Connecticut, April 1980.

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The Influence of a Psychology of Women Course on Sex-Role Concept, Assertiveness, and Attitudes Towards Women[1]

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Short Abstract

College students in a psychology of women course based on empirical research and psychological theory became significantly more androgynous/masculine in sex-role concept, more assertive in self-reported behavior, more positive in attitudes towards women. Students in comparison courses in psychology and in a political science women's students course did not.

Purpose

Recent studies (Ruble, Croke, Frieze, and Parsons, 1975; Brush, Gold, and White, 1978) on the effects of women's studies courses have indicated that there are two general approaches to teaching: a concern for competence or mastery and a concern for personal change and advocacy (Micossi, 1970). These concerns or goals are defined as:

(1) traditional academic goals of intellectual mastery of subject matter and the imparting of a substantial amount of information and

(2) less traditional goals of personal change, analogous to those changes attempted by consciousness-raising groups (Brush, Gold, and White, 1978, p. 870).

The purpose of the present study is to determine if a psychology of women course based on solid empirical research and psychological theory[2] can promote personal change. The specific hypothesis is that students taking a psychology of women course will become more androgynous and masculine in sex-role concept, more assertive, and more positive in their attitudes toward women than students taking other courses.

[1]Presented at the Eastern Psychological Association's Fifty-First Annual Meeting, Hartford, Connecticut, April 1980.

[2]A list of the topics covered will be sent upon request.

Subjects

Subjects were 71 undergraduate women attending Montclair State College during 1978-79: 40 from psychology of women classes and a comparison group of 31 from classes in psychology (motivation and tests and measurements) and political science (women in politics). All courses were taught by women.

Procedure

Subjects completed pretest questionnaires during the first week of classes and posttest questionnaires during the last week of classes. The questionnaires consisted of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (1974) from which masculinity, femininity, and sex-role concept scores were derived, the Rathus Assertiveness Scale (1973), and the Craig Attitudes Towards Women Scale (CATW) (1977).

Results

The data was analyzed using t-tests to determine if differences existed between courses, and within each course at pretest and posttest. The data indicate that there were no significant differences in masculinity or sex-role concept scores across courses at pretest (see Tables 1 and 2). However, there were significant differences in femininity scores at pretest; students in psychology of women and motivation courses scored significantly higher in femininity than students in tests and measurements and women in politics (t (44) = 2.506, $p < .05$; t (44) = 2.272, $p < .05$; t (23) = 3.033, $p < .01$; t (23) = 2.909, $p < .01$, respectively). At posttest, psychology of women students scored significantly higher in masculinity than students in motivation (t (57) = 2.049, $p < .05$)

and both psychology of women and motivation students continued to score significantly higher in femininity than students in women in politics (t (44) = 2.025, $p < .05$; t (23) = 2.494, $p < .05$, respectively).

The hypothesis on the impact of a psychology of women course on masculinity scores and on sex-role concept scores was supported by the data. The sex-role concept of the students in the psychology of women course became significantly more androgynous and more masculine than the subjects in the comparison classes (X^2 (2) = 11.401, $p < .01$) (see Table 2). Students in psychology of women scored significantly higher in masculinity during posttest than during pretest (t (39) = 5.914, $p < .001$). Students in the women's studies course, women in politics, also scored significantly higher in masculinity during posttest than during pretest (t (5) = 2.655, $p < .05$). There were no significant before and after differences in femininity scores (see Table 1).

The hypothesis on assertiveness was also supported. Students in psychology of women scored significantly higher in assertiveness posttest than pretest (t (39) = 5.751, $p < .001$). The data indicated no significant differences in assertiveness across groups either before or after. (Although there are differences in the means, the ranges and standard deviations were so large, these differences were not significant.)

The last part of the hypothesis on attitudes towards women was also supported. Students in the psychology of women scored more positively in their attitudes towards women posttest than pretest (t (39) = -10.050, $p < .001$). There were no significant differences

across groups in attitudes towards women during pretest but during posttest psychology of women students were significantly more positive in their attitudes than students in motivation ($\underline{t}$ (57) = -3.368, p $<$ .05).

Conclusions

The data in this study strongly support the hypothesis. Psychology of women students do score higher in masculinity, become more androgynous or masculine in sex-role concept, more assertive in self-reported behavior, and more positive in their attitudes towards women. Students in comparison classes in psychology and in a women's study course in political science did not experience these same changes. While the students in women in politics scored higher in masculinity posttest than they did pretest, they did not experience changes in sex-role concepts, become more assertive, nor more positive in their attitudes towards women.

Contrary to the suggestions of other researchers (Ruble, et al, 1975; Brush, et al, 1978) the students in psychology of women were not less traditional in self-concept than women taking other courses. In fact, at pretest the students in the various courses were not significantly different in masculinity scores, self-concept, assertiveness, or attitudes towards women. The only pretest difference involved femininity scores. Students in psychology of women and in motivation scored higher in femininity than students in tests and measurements and in women in politics. By posttest only students in women in politics maintained significantly lower femininity scores than students in psychology of women or motivation.

It is clear that the students in the psychology of women did not see themselves as less traditional but rather as integrating both feminine and masculine attributes in a balance which shifted from feminine at pretest to slightly masculine at posttest (see Table 1). These shifts resulted in self-concepts which were significantly more androgynous and more masculine at posttest (see Table 2). These shifts did not take place for students in the comparison classes.

Examination of Table 1 indicates that at pretest students in psychology of women were the least assertive and the least positive (not significantly) in their attitudes towards women. By posttest, they became the most assertive and the most positive towards women (not significantly). These changes in scores are a reflection of the significant increase in the self-reported measure of assertiveness and in the positive change in attitudes towards women posttest for students in the psychology of women.

The results of this study seem to indicate that some measure of resocialization did take place for students in psychology of women courses. These changes appear to be related to the intellectual mastery of the course content. By acquiring competence and mastery of the subject matter of the psychology of women, students do seem to undergo personal change. The data in this study support the view that both traditional and nontraditional goals of teaching can be achieved by an emphasis on "intellectual mastery of subject matter."

Reference Note

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Table 1

Pre- and Posttest Comparisons of Scores for Masculinity, Femininity, Assertiveness, and Attitudes Towards Women[a]

Course	Masculinity		Femininity		Assertiveness		Attitudes/Women	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Psychology of Women	4.703	5.261***	5.067	5.093	13.08	27.00***	90.78	75.68***
Motivation	4.797	4.900	5.203	5.179	17.26	17.53	89.90	89.16
Tests and Measurements	4.742	5.018	4.550	4.817	27.33	26.33	78.67	78.83
Women in Politics	4.867	5.158*	4.642	4.667	26.00	21.50	81.00	76.67

[a]Higher scores indicate more masculine, more feminine, more assertive, and less positive attitudes towards women.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 2

Pre- and Posttest Comparisons of Sex-Role Concepts for Students in Psychology of Women and Comparison Classes

Course	Pretest			Posttest		
	Feminine	Androgynous	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Masculine
Psychology of Women	19	17	4	6	22	12**
Comparison Courses	16	8	7	13	9	9

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$